

## **VILLAGE BOARD SPECIAL MEETING**

**Bethalto, IL**

**April 1, 2019**

The Village Board of Trustees met on the above date in the Council Room of Village Hall in a special meeting called to order by Mayor Winslow at 7:00 p.m. The meeting opened with the “Pledge of Allegiance”. Roll call was taken by Village Clerk Sue Lowrance. Present: Trustees Mull, Bost, Dugger, Gibbons, Buhs, and Mayor Winslow. Trustee McRae was absent. Also present: Police Chief Craig Welch, Deputy Police Chief Jason Lamb, Public Works Director Rod Cheatham, Fire Chief Alex Campbell, Zoning Administrator Tim Brown, and a large crowd of residents.

### **REPORTS FROM THE MAYOR:**

Mayor Winslow opened the meeting by stating that a few members of the Board of Trustees had requested to meet in order to discuss concerns over the previous discussion of crime free housing and the direction that the Village was headed regarding staffing needs for the program. Trustee Bost stated he had asked for the meeting to discuss budgeting issues, and that he believes this is not an “emergency meeting” as it was reported in the press and social media. Trustees Mull, Bost, and Dugger all stated they wanted to meet to “discuss the numbers” before any decision was made; Trustee Mull asked if the program had already moved forward, it was then noted that Officer Michelle Skinner had been out working with Zoning Administrator Brown earlier in the day. Mayor Winslow then opened the floor to the public, many of whom were in attendance to discuss issues at Metro Apartments, which it was noted is a separate issue from the Crime Free Housing program.

Mr. Deedrich from the Gateway Association of Realtors spoke on behalf of his association in opposition of Crime Free Housing, stating that the board members seem confused as to where the ordinance stands (although no ordinance has been enacted at this time) and that a non-Home Rule municipality cannot have crime free housing per state statutes. He noted concerns with a representative from the Village being accompanied by a police officer while doing inspections, noting that occupancy inspections should be bureaucratic in nature. He

urged the board to be sure they are following the law if crime free housing is implemented within the Village.

Mayor Winslow stated that he feels this meeting is ill-conceived in that the Village is not yet near implementing any sort of ordinances for crime free housing and that everything is still in the discussion phase. Robby Lowrance asked if a police officer was sent out to assist in the inspection process; Winslow answered that Officer Skinner was doing so in training.

Local landlord Greg Goode addressed the board, stating that he's been a property owner in town for over 50 years and that he and many of the local landlords do their due diligence in finding good, honest renters and asked that the Village not impose new rules on those who aren't the problem.

Kathi Cooper, a third generation property owner, stated that she relies on the property inspection process in order to assure that her properties are up to codes. She is in favor of the regulations that may be imposed with crime free housing.

Aubrey Klein, a tenant at Metro Apartments, informed the board of issues she's repeatedly had at Metro Apartments. She has had issues with repairs not being completed, leaks, doors off hinges, drafty windows leading to outrageous power bills, as well as maintenance men entering her home without her knowledge. She expressed concern over the conditions of the property and the safety of residents there.

William Norris, a former tenant at Metro, also expressed his concerns with the conditions at the apartments. He cited mold issues, leaking roofs with water pouring from electrical fixtures, ceiling tiles falling, etc. Conditions finally got so bad that he contacted the Village,

and upon inspection the building in which he resided had the power cut to it and he was forced to relocate. He pleaded that something be done to help the residents of the complex.

Perry Cox, former property manager at Metro, stated that he was moved to another complex when he became vocal about the conditions at Metro. Cox contacted the Village when he realized the conditions at Metro and that nobody in management seemed to care. He stated that the units “aren’t fit for human dwelling” but that residents don’t have the resources to break leases and move elsewhere. He also stated that once the Village got involved, management seemed to want to fix things. Cox said that inspections were an issue; he would call for an inspection and no one would show up. He said that all of the units should be thoroughly inspected.

Miranda, another resident at Metro, said that she has not seen the same issues as those described. She currently lives in a remodeled unit and stated that any time she’s had an issue it has been fixed promptly. She did say that she was allowed to move in without a permit being issued because the inspector “didn’t have time”. She stated that she does not want to see empty buildings as those invite crime, so encouraged the work at Metro to continue.

Mayor Winslow clarified that the Village has mandated that no new buildings at Metro be occupied until the other units have been brought up to code and inspections passed.

Consuela Gray and Tiana Womack, representing the other two displaced families from Metro, echoed the conditions previously described by tenants. They noted leaky roofs, water coming from fixtures, mold, drywall and ceiling damage, drafty windows, and generally unsafe conditions. Management has been unresponsive to their needs and refuses to do repairs, yet have increased their rent. They were never offered to be moved to the remodeled units. Ms. Gray stated that ordinances need to be in place to help protect tenants.

Robert Lowrance, another local landlord, stated that nobody should have to live in the conditions described, and that the concerns seem to be about one particular complex in town and that all landlords shouldn't be punished for the actions of one landlord and one employee. Lowrance agreed that occupancy permits are necessary, but would like clarification of what is being proposed under the crime free housing plan. Mayor Winslow said that once the board gets to that point, it will be explained in depth. Lowrance reiterated that no one should be living in sub-par conditions in Bethalto, and that as long as a good occupancy inspector is doing his job, the police assistance shouldn't be needed.

Resident Dale Norris spoke, stating that her daughter lives in Metro Apartments and has had several issues there; she was even told by management to "get a lawyer" and "call the police" when she had complaints. Norris said that all landlords need to be held responsible for their renters and the conditions of their rentals and cited issues with neighboring properties, drugs, and suspicious activity. Norris said the Village does need a competent inspector and people to enforce the codes across the board. Norris urged the Village to come up with a plan of attack for the Metro situation and to shut them down if necessary.

Landlord Justin Brown stated that Metro seems to be the problem, not all landlords. The Village already has rules in place, so why aren't they being enforced. He said he isn't blaming anyone, just wondered if further training needs to be done. Brown asked if inspections were completed at Metro at any time, noting that when the property changed hands there should have been a mass inspection. He added that everyone shouldn't suffer because of one property owner; he asked for no additional rules, just enforcement of what's already in place.

Austin Opp expressed concern over the occupancy permit process, noting that permits are currently issued to the property owner rather than the tenant. He said that the Village should

issue the permit in the renter's name so that they always know who is occupying the property.

Amber Young, whose disabled father lives in Metro, spoke on her father's behalf and noted similar issues as described by other tenants—leaking roofs, windows, issues with carpeting, etc. She has seen open drug deals and knows that neighbors are selling drugs; she has contacted police but they either arrive too late or nothing is happening when they arrive. Metro has given her father a hard time over rent payments—they won't take a check and insisted on moneygrams, then charged \$100 late fee for a day late. She agreed that it is hard to get management to take responsibility for anything, and her father has lived there over six years. She noted that one of the storage facilities at the complex was repaired and updated prior to other residential units being fixed. She again expressed concern over the police response time with drug calls and suspicious activity.

Metro resident Christopher Davis spoke, confirming issues similar to those described previously. He stated management would tell him “nothing can be done about it” and that they couldn't be transferred to another unit. He has missed work due to issues with his apartment. He feels as if he shouldn't have had to deal with everything he's dealt with and that the board should consider the scope of the problem and that the entire complex should be shut down until it is fixed.

Landlord Robby Lowrance said that it seems to be more of an occupancy permit problem than a crime problem, and asked if Metro currently has any valid permits for their remodeling. Zoning Administrator Brown stated they do have roofing permits and that other permits are being worked on currently. Lowrance reiterated that the Village seems to be having an issue with permits.

Kathi Cooper again spoke to stress that she feels the permit process is vital and that there are landlords who “sneak around the system”. She said she believes that nobody should have to live in bad conditions, but that crime is also a problem. Cooper agrees with more regulation.

Mayor Winslow announced the public comment portion of the meeting as closed.

Winslow stated that Chief Welch has in the past expressed his needs for another officer, which is done through the budgeting process, and he’s sure this will come up again with the upcoming budget looming. Any hiring of anyone will be decided at that time. Trustee Bost said that that was what he wanted to hear, that a new hire isn’t something we’re adding immediately. Bost further stated that this was a good meeting with some good information brought to light and that there are obviously a lot of issues to be dealt with. Trustee Mull urged Metro residents to contact some of the “good landlords” in town, as there is a lot of quality rental property to be had and agreed that there are a lot of issues at hand. Trustee Gibbons noted that there have been issues between board members that could have been alleviated with better communication and transparency. Trustee Dugger asked Police Chief Welch and Zoning Administrator Brown what the steps currently are if a tenant complains about a property. Chief Welch said his department does nothing as it is not his to handle; Zoning Administrator Brown stated that any complaint is investigated, an inspection done, and a notice of 30 days to fix any violations is issued. After 30 days, legal action is taken through our Zoning attorney’s office. Gibbons asked if Metro had been cited; “a hundred” is the number estimated for violations. Upon discussion of crime free housing, Welch informed the board “that’s not me, that’s you” and that his actions in supplying an officer are in response to the Zoning Administrator’s request for assistance. Welch then emphatically expressed his opinion regarding his staffing needs and the importance of dealing with the Metro situation, noting that his job as Police Chief is to enforce the ordinances as set forth by

the governing body. He encouraged the board to give him the manpower needed to do his job or change the laws if they don't like how they're being enforced.

Having no further business, a **motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Bost, seconded by Dugger**. All voted aye viva voce. Meeting adjourned at 8:40pm.

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Sue E. Lowrance, Village Clerk

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Alan Winslow, Mayor